

Evaluation of the master thesis written by Vanessa Horler: Uneven and combined. A Historical sociological approach to the European collective identity crisis.

I will start with the overall evaluation. In terms of content and the way it is written, it is most probably the best master thesis I have read this year. The thesis excellently uses/applies a theoretical concept (framework) of so called uneven and combined development on the historical development of the so called V4 countries (East-Central Europe). I consider the thesis as a perfect example of historical sociology – it employs comparative approach (at least implicitly to define what is so different of V4) and traces the uneven and combined character/pattern of East-Central Europe back to the Middle Ages, although some of the scholars argue that we can talk about the uneven and combined development only after the capitalist revolution. It also deals with a very relevant topic. I would also like to highlight the multidisciplinary approach to the thesis.

I also like a large amount of literature studied and used. For example, I would like to highlight the literary review covering the multiple crisis of the European Union (identity crisis, democracy deficit, financial crisis and its repercussions, centre-periphery economic relations, priority to its economic commitments over original values, Central and Eastern member states crisis). All those scholars covering the many different aspects of the “crisis” are characteristically summed up by the author of the thesis as dealing with the uneven and combined development: “Based on this abstraction, one could argue that the most essential characteristic of the EU is also its Achilles heel, namely the uneven and combined nature of the Union.” (page 17).

The main argument of the thesis is that V4 is historically distinct region of Europe. Change has been predominantly shaped by external factors since 800 AD. Contemporary V4 cooperation is seen as a backlash to the Western hegemony in the EU. Which is perceived by the V4 countries as a repetition of the older/recent Soviet hegemony. Plus, the V4 cooperation is result of an intellectual discussion of 1980s and 1990s (the topic dominated the intellectual discussion: East-Central Europe).

However, I see few basic weaknesses. Formally, I miss a content. I also miss a proper title of particular chapters (for example “Chapter 2”, page 18). I consider the conclusion (page 58) as a very/too short – it does not “sell” most of the findings and innovative arguments of the thesis.

Questions for the debate:

1. What is the relation between the multiple modernities theory (Eisenstadt, Arnason) and the concept of uneven and combined development? Is it the case that the latter approach builds on the processes linked to capitalism first of all? Would it bring different results in the analyses of the East-Central Europe, if you use the concept of multiple modernities theory?
2. The same question is for the concept of center-periphery (for example the way Wallerstein uses this)?

I would recommend mark “excellent”.

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